

# ICONOGRAPHY OF THE HINDUS, BUDDHISTS & JAINS

Proceedings of the National Conference on  
January 8 & 9, 2016



edited by

**Nanditha Krishna**



**C.P.R. Publications**

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## EMERGENCE OF VAISHNAVA IMAGERY IN GANDHARA: NUMISMATIC AND SCULPTURAL EVIDENCE

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The discovery of the six bilingual silver drachms issued by the Indo-Greek king, Agathocles, depicting Balarāma-Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, hidden in a pilgrim's water-vessel in a room of the administrative quarter of the ancient Greek city of Aī Khanum<sup>1</sup> in northern Afghanistan by French archaeologists on 3 October 1970 revolutionised our knowledge of the Vaiṣṇava imagery in north India (Fig. 1A)<sup>2</sup>. This series carries bilingual legends, on the obverse written in Greek: ΒΑΘΙΑΕΩΣ ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΑΘΟΥΣ and on the reverse in Brāhmi: *rajane Agathukleyasa*, both meaning 'of the king Agathocles' (Fig.1B). I have proposed to place the reign of this Indo-Greek king between 180 and 160 BCE<sup>3</sup>. These coins, most probably struck in Taxila, enabled us to propose an absolute chronology for the iconography for these two divine brothers.

Jean Filliozat correctly identified the divinity holding a *musala* (pestle) and a *hala* (plough) as Saṃkarṣaṇa-Balarāma and the one holding a *cakra* (wheel) and a *śaṅkha* (conch-shell) as Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa<sup>4</sup>. The attributes held by each god correspond to the Indian literary data of the time, such as *Arthaśāstra*, the *Mahābārata*, and the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali<sup>5</sup>. The god on the obverse holding a plough in his left hand is Balarāma (Rāma the Mighty), elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, as 'plough carrier (*halabhrt*)' or as god "plough-weaponed" (*halāyudha*)' clearly evoke both his agrarian and warrior character.<sup>6</sup> The *musala* (pestle) held in the right hand, according to the Epic and Purāṇic tradition, is synonymous with Saṃkarṣaṇa, the first of Viṣṇu's (Vāsudeva's) vyūha forms.<sup>7</sup> The representations of Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's brother holding a club and plough reappear on the bronze coins the Indo-Scythian Maues (Fig. 2)<sup>8</sup>.

The god on the reverse holds a wheel with eight spokes, a distinctive attribute of Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, who like Saṃkarṣaṇa, is another form of Viṣṇu. However, even though the attribute held in the hand was interpreted as a *śaṅkha* (conch) by Jean Filliozat, another characteristic attribute of Vāsudeva- Kṛṣṇa, its pear-shaped form led Paul Bernard to describe it, with precaution, as a high-necked vase<sup>9</sup>. Another puzzling question was how to interpret



what Audouin and Bernard described as “imposing helmet-shaped headdress”<sup>10</sup>. John Filliozat<sup>11</sup> followed by Gérard Fussman<sup>12</sup> observed that it is a misinterpretation of a parasol (*chatra*). C. Schmid draws our attention to a statue of a Bodhisattva from Mathurā, now in the Lucknow Museum surmounted by exactly the same type of shaft with the half-moon shaped *chatra*<sup>13</sup>. Further notable characteristics of the depiction of these gods are their drapes with stiff and starched folds, their outward turned feet shown in profile and their static frontal pose instead of the usual three-quarter pose of the Greek gods on the contemporary Greek coins. There are many examples of the formative period of Indian art to show that in early sculptures of the Bharhut<sup>14</sup> and Sāñci<sup>15</sup> stūpa the feet are in side-view similar to these coins. Rémy Audouin and Paul Bernard<sup>16</sup> correctly observed that the way these gods are depicted on the coins is not in accordance with the contemporary Greek engraving as one can observe on the Attic standard tetradrachms of the same Agathocles showing Zeus holding Hecate<sup>17</sup>. The lack of proportions, ‘awkward rendering’ of the feet and disproportion of the so-called headdress made them to conclude that these coin dies were engraved by an Indian engraver who was familiar with the conventions of archaic Indian art<sup>18</sup>. I believe that the dies were engraved by a well-experienced Greek engraver who was looking at existing statues of these two gods without grasping the symbolism of the Indian symbolism. In other words the engraver, copying the Indian prototype, misunderstood the parasol (*chatra*) and transformed it into headgear. In the same way, the Greek engraver may have misinterpreted the symbolism of the *śaṅkha* (conch) and converted it into a high-necked vase. This is one of the rational explanations for the odd looking *śaṅkha* and *chatra*. If this hypothesis is correct, it means that images made of perishable material or even of non-perishable material such as stone, lost forever or undiscovered until today, may have existed before the date of this coin series, in other words before the 2nd century BCE.

P.L. Gupta when discussing the eventual identification of the female figure holding a flower and moving to the left depicted on the bronze coins of Pantaleon (Fig. 3)<sup>19</sup> and Agathocles<sup>20</sup> proposed to see Ekānaṁśā or Subhadrā, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa’s own sister<sup>21</sup>. As P.S. Jaini pointed out, Ekānaṁśā, the sister of Kṛṣṇa, who was worshipped as the personification of Durgā, appears for the first time in the *Harivaṁśa Parva* in connection with the birth of Kṛṣṇa<sup>22</sup>. It is said in the *Vaiṣṇavakhṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* (ch. 19, 10), that Subhadrā of charming face, grants boons and immunity from fear (through the positions of her fingers) and holds a lotus (in her hand). Paul Bernard correctly draws our attention to another possibility; it is to consider her as Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth, fortune, and prosperity as well as the consort of Viṣṇu. There is a confusion in the *Purāṇas* which is not arbitrary, between Subhadrā and Lakṣmī, the former being considered as a manifestation of Lakṣmī<sup>23</sup>.

Lakṣmī, as goddess of beauty, wealth, fortune, and prosperity and as the consort and the active energy of Viṣṇu, enjoyed an immense popularity in ancient art. She was given a prominent place in early Buddhist art, in particular in the Bharhut and Sāñcī Stūpas which date back to the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, being, in another words, almost contemporary to the monetary issues of Pantaleon and Agathocles. Lakṣmī, the goddess of abundance, also appears on a rare series of silver tetradrachms of Azislises, an Indo-Scythian ruler who may have reigned in the middle of the 1st century BCE<sup>24</sup>.

I find it difficult to accept Charlotte Schmid's opinion according to which in the absence of any contemporary Indian equivalent, the representations of these deities (Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa and Lakṣmī) were not inspired by Indian models<sup>25</sup>. On the contrary, it is quite possible, that at least fifty years before the emission of the bilingual coins depicting Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Lakṣmī by Agathocles, there was a tradition of depicting gods related to *Vaiṣṇavaism*. The female figure, in a hieratic appearance, compared to the ones on the bronze coins of Pantaleon and Agathocles, holding a flower, was identified correctly by Paul Bernard as another depiction of Lakṣmī (Fig. 4)<sup>26</sup>. These coins, known as 'Taxila type' were attributed to the period between the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire and the arrival of Indo-Greeks. For my part I believe that these bronze coins were Indian issues struck by Demetrios I, the first Greek sovereign to conquer Indian territories after Alexander the Great, taking advantage of the decline of the Mauryan Empire. I have dated them to the beginning of the 2nd century BCE<sup>27</sup>. By examining the bronze coins issued by Agathocles and Pantaleon depicting goddess closely associated with Viṣṇu, we begin to realize that these two Indo-Greek kings continued an already existing tradition.

Various attempts were made by numismatists to identify the human figures holding various attributes, appearing on the Imperial series of the punch-marked coins dated to the 3rd century BCE. The recent article by Wilfried Pieper has proposed a comprehensive survey of these coins with Vaiṣṇava divinities<sup>28</sup>. The god most probably holding a plough in his raised left hand and pestle in his raised right hand is no doubt Balarāma<sup>29</sup>. We now have solid evidence to show the Bhāgavata cult was popular in these regions as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. I agree with Audouin and Bernard and accept the fact that Agathocles' coins give us a perfectly clear and explicit illustration of the first forms of *Vaiṣṇavaism in India*<sup>30</sup>. The irony is that the oldest of the inscriptions relating to the Bhāgavata cult with historical implications, is a dedication by a Greek who proclaims himself a 'devotee of the Lord-God' (*bhāgavata*). The famous Besnagar column (near Vidiśa in Madhya Pradesh), was erected in honour of Vāsudeva, the god of gods (*devadeva*), by a Greek from Taxila (*Takhashilāka*), Heliodoros son of Dion, ambassador of the Great king (*mahārāja*) Antialcidas (*Amtalikita*) to the local

king Bhāgabhadra the Saviour (*trātāra*)<sup>31</sup>. It was in this auspicious ambience that the Bhāgavata worship developed in Taxila and in the surrounding Gandhāran region during the two centuries before the Common Era.

However, this popularity underwent a significant decline in the Greater Gandhāran region during the Kuṣān period when Vima Kadphises, grandson of Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the Kuṣān Empire, openly stated that he was a worshipper of Śiva by representing the image of the god and by fully proclaiming his profession of faith in the legends in *Gāndhārī* and Kharoṣṭhī: *sarvalogaisvara* ‘Lord of the earth’<sup>32</sup>. Skanda-Kumara (Kārttikēya), son of Śiva enjoys an unprecedented popularity in numismatic and plastic art during the Kuṣān period<sup>33</sup>. Viṣṇu makes only a brief appearance on two bronze coin types of Huvishaka; to these I shall return shortly.

As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, compared to the codified iconography of the Hindu gods in the contemporary Mathurā art,<sup>34</sup> almost all the Hindu gods during this period in the *Gandhāra region* go through a transitional phase. For example, compared to Śiva on the later series of the king Vima Kadphises (Fig. 5),<sup>35</sup> the naked Śiva on the first series is not ithyphallic. At close examination, it becomes clear that this type is modelled on the image of Heracles portrayed on the coins of Kujula Kadphises<sup>36</sup>. Even (Fig. 6A) image of Śiva on these issues of Vima Kadphises is a composite image, where the artist borrows attributes of other divinities from the Hindu pantheon to create a fused divinity (Fig. 6B). On the shaft of the trident that the god holds, the axe (*paraśu*), the thunderbolt (*vajra*), and the wheel (*cakra*) are affixed. The trident (*triśūla*) is one of the principal attributes of Śiva, used as a weapon (*āyudha*)<sup>37</sup>. The axe (*paraśu*), itself a war weapon, even in a secondary manner, is also linked to the persona of Śiva<sup>38</sup>. The wheel (*cakra*), a dreadful projectile weapon with its sharp external rim, is an attribute *par excellence* of Viṣṇu<sup>39</sup>. The other symbol attached to the upper handle of the trident is a thunderbolt (*vajra*); the attribute of Indra, god of thunder and rain. He also holds the *kamaṇḍalu*, the receptacle of holy water of Brahmā, the creator<sup>40</sup>. We are confronted here with a syncretic deity, prior to the polarization and codification of symbols of later Hindu iconography where each god is equipped with stereotypical attributes.

When the Kuṣāns were nearing their apogee, cultural interactions with the Hellenistic, Iranian and Indian worlds in these frontier regions gave birth to a progressive Indianisation. The result of these interactions was the emergence of a composite iconography. The identification of a deity holding attributes described in sacred texts as belonging to several gods of the Hindu pantheon is often confusing. I have drawn the attention to such sculptures of the Kuṣān period found in Gandhāra. Let us examine three of them briefly<sup>41</sup>.

The first image is of the former Pontecorvo collection now in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome (Fig. 7)<sup>42</sup>. This ithyphallic and three-headed divinity has four arms, with each hand holding a *triśūla*, *kamaṇḍalu*, a *cakra* and an *akṣamālā* respectively. Of the god's three heads (the fourth not being shown for technical reasons) the central face is human with a moustache. The lateral faces are those of a boar with protruding tusks and the other resembling a bovine with globular eyes. The erect *liṅga*, as well as the *triśūla* and the third eye are characteristics of Śiva. However the *kamaṇḍalu* and *akṣamālā* are, above all, attributes of Brahmā. Even if one could argue that the *kamaṇḍalu* may stand for the ascetic nature of Śiva and the *akṣamālā* used by him when killing the Gajāśura, one has to bear in mind this iconography appears much later<sup>43</sup>. The *cakra* and the head of boar with protruding tusks, evoke Viṣṇu and his boar-avatāra (Varāha).

The Indra appears in the guise of Viṣṇu in one of the many 'composite' images from Gandhāra. The identification of the deity with six arms depicted on a relief from the Swat valley, now in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome was a matter of controversy (Fig. 8). The confusion stemmed from the fact that in four out of the six remaining arms, the god holds a sword, a thunderbolt, a spear and a wheel. G. Gnoli who published it first identified the figure, without hesitation, as Śiva<sup>44</sup>. R.C. Agrawala, as a composite divinity representing Viṣṇu, Śiva and Indra<sup>45</sup>. Maurizio Taddei, also confused by the 'syncretic aspect' of the deity, proposed a complex form of Skanda-Kārttikēya, and insisted on the solar character and its Syrian derivation<sup>46</sup>. I have proposed to identify this deity as one of many composite deities going through a transitional period before the codification<sup>47</sup>. Here we have a 'fused' divinity holding four attributes of four different Brahmanical gods: Viṣṇu's *cakra*, a weapon signifying the absolute might in destroying evil, Śiva's sword (*asi*) one of the *āyudhas* of the destroyer, Kārttikēya's *śakti* (spear), and Indra's *vajra*, the chief weapon of the Vedic sky-god of thunder and lighting. At first glance, however, the god appears to be Indra because of his crown. In many Gandhāran sculptures, in particular, the panel showing the Bodhisattva as King Sibi ransoming a pigeon with his own flesh, Indra wears a similar cylindrical crown, its side cross-hatched and with mouldings above, resting on a rounded ornament brim<sup>48</sup>.

In this context, another image most probably from Rabatak, also represents an analogous 'composite' divinity in the guise of Indra, as indicated by the same type of a cylindrical crown and *vajra* (Fig. 9)<sup>49</sup>. Wearing a *dhotī* and an *uttariya* thrown over the shoulders, the god whose divine nature is conveyed by the halo is depicted frontally. He is also Viṣṇu as indicated by the *cakra* held in the upper right hand and the *śaṅkha* held by both lower hands. He blows into the conch shell which is held close to the lips. The *śaṅkha* is one of the main attributes of Viṣṇu. This sculpture is also unique, because it is the earliest depiction of Viṣṇu known until now where the God is depicted holding the *śaṅkha* in both hands.



The composite nature thus revealed by the sculptures discussed above and many others already published elsewhere, was slowly transformed into a rigid iconography towards the end of the Kuṣān rule in Gandhāra. A unique sculpture (height 60cm) from Gandhāra, that I have published elsewhere shows an innovative iconography of an anthropomorphic Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and a zoomorphic Viṣṇu-Varāha (Fig. 10)<sup>50</sup>. Behind a boar standing to right, Viṣṇu is shown frontally wearing a long *dhotī*, jewelled necklace, a well elaborated crown and a rich *kunḍala*. He holds in the back right hand a *cakra*, in the front right hand a flower, in the back left hand a *daṇḍa* and a in the front left hand a *śaṅkha*. The standing small figure under the right arms of Viṣṇu could be either a *āyudha-puruṣa* or the rescued Bhū Devī (Earth). The god depicted behind the boar is undoubtedly Viṣṇu as revealed by his attributes (*cakra*, *padma*, *daṇḍa* and *śaṅkha*). In the iconography depicting this episode, Varāha is usually shown with a human body and a boar-head and the majority of sculptures capture the moment when Varāha emerges from the Ocean bearing Bhū Devī who hangs on to one of his tusks<sup>51</sup> or sits on his right thigh<sup>52</sup>. The Varāha cult gained popularity during the Gupta period as attested by many panels dating back to the 5th century. The colossal Varāha panel from Udayagiri (Vidiśa) in Madhya Pradesh and the carving of Varāha of the 7th century from Māmallapuram carrying a realistically sized Bhū Devī in his arms are some among many depictions of the boar incarnation<sup>53</sup>.

In the sculpture under discussion, the absence of the mythical serpent (Ādiśeṣa) and of Bhū Devī – if she is not the small figure to the left – is noteworthy. Obviously this remarkable sculpture does not represent the moment when Viṣṇu-Varāha rescues the Earth from the deep waters, yet it shows very clearly the god represented here as both Varāha and Viṣṇu, in other words as the anthropomorphic Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and the zoomorphic Viṣṇu-Varāha<sup>54</sup>. This beautiful sculpture may date back to the 3rd or 4th century CE. What is interesting to note is that the sculpture is not marked by the same syncretism or fusion that we observed in some of the sculptures discussed in this article (Figs. 7-9). However, the sculptor has not attempted to create an image of Viṣṇu-Varāha based on passages in the sacred texts. This unorthodox iconography, as compared to other images which do conform to the descriptions formulated in the holy texts, is more freely sculpted. The Gandhāran sculptors seem to have enjoyed, during the early periods, some independence in the land of cross-fertilisation where many cultures met.

Having gone through a transitional period, Hindu iconography developed into a codified orthodoxy where textual descriptions were carried out with scrupulous accuracy. The two armed Varāha image from Banu, now in the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi, is no doubt the earliest depiction of Viṣṇu-Varāha rescuing the Bhū Devī where we begin to see

the codified iconography<sup>55</sup>. Viṣṇu, incarnated as Varāha, is shown with a human body and a boar head, holding the club in the right hand and trampling the Nāga with both legs in an exultant pose of triumph. Bhū Devī is propped up against his left shoulder in similar fashion to the great relief of Udayagiri<sup>56</sup>.

It is in this context I wish to discuss the two depictions of Viṣṇu on two bronze series of Huviška, the Kuṣāna king who reined in a vast empire, after Kaniška I. His reign is placed during the second half of the 2nd century CE. Compared to both gold and bronze coins of Huviška where the name of the divinity is written on the reverse, the two types depicting Viṣṇu bear the legend *yodhavade* written Kharoṣṭhī. Harry Falk explains the legend as being composed of the Sanskrit *yodha* (warrior) and *vade* (condition or status) possibly relating to Huviška's extensive military expeditions<sup>57</sup>. The first coin deserving our attention is from the British Museum. The bowman standing holding a bow in the left hand and probably an arrow in the right is identified as Rāma by Joe Cribb<sup>58</sup>. Devendra Handa identifies a group of copper coins of the Ujjain region datable to the 2nd or 1st century BCE showing two men standing holding a bow on either side of a female figure, as the earliest numismatic depictions of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa<sup>59</sup>. Both types were no doubt meant to illustrate Rāma, the avatāra of Viṣṇu. The bow the god holds corresponds to the description given by *Nearchus*, the Cretan chronicler who accompanied Alexander into *India*, who noted that the *bowmen* had to rest the bow, as tall as them, on the ground and steady it with the left foot. They shot arrows almost of three cubits long to which no shield or armour resisted (Arrian, VIII, 16, 6-7). The most ancient depiction of a similar bowman in India is to be found in the verandah of the cave no. XIX of the Bājā cave complex (Fig. 11)<sup>60</sup>.

The second series known so far from two bronze coins certainly depicts Viṣṇu with eight arms. The first one was reported from the Kashmir Smast, a series of limestone caves, situated in the Babozai and Pirsai mountains in the Mardan Valley in Northern Pakistan (Fig. 12). Nasim Khan, who published it first, correctly identifies the god on the reverse as Viṣṇu, but instead of eight arms he sees only six<sup>61</sup>. In the same book he also published a second specimen of the same series conserved in the British Museum without further commentary<sup>62</sup>. The British Museum coin was published twice<sup>63</sup>. Cribb correctly counts eight arms and identifies the conch shell, *cakra* and club. Like Nasim Khan, J. Cribb also sees the 'plant sprouting between the legs', but does not discuss its symbolism<sup>64</sup>. The poor condition of the two coins led all the three authors to be cautious in identifying the attributes, though all of them agreed to consider him as Viṣṇu, thanks to the conch held in front of the chest.



A hitherto unpublished sculpture of Viṣṇu made of schist recently found in Gandhāra has three notable characteristics already observed on the coin series: first of all the god has eight arms, secondly he holds *śaṅkha* in highest pair of hands and thirdly he is seated behind a tree (Fig. 13). The *śaṅkha* (conch) of terrific sound having the lustre of the moon and *cakra*, the discus with the lustre of the Sun, two of Viṣṇu's attributes are clearly visible. The *cakra* placed on the ground is held with the lower left hand. The broken spherical head of the *daṇḍa* (mace) posed on the ground has survived to the right of the right foot of the seated divinity<sup>65</sup>. The other probable attributes of Viṣṇu, the sword and Puṇḍarīka (white lotus) are lost with the broken arms<sup>66</sup>.

The similarity of the present sculpture (Fig. 13) and Viṣṇu-Varāha (Fig. 10) discussed earlier to the Gandhāran tradition is revealed by its excellent workmanship worthy of any classical Gandhāran sculpture, and by the fact it is carved in grey schist commonly used by Gandhāran sculptors. Viṣṇu's crown resembles the headpiece representing city walls or towers (*corona muralis*) worn by Tyche or City goddesses mainly during the Hellenistic period. In Gandhāran art, in some reliefs depicting the Great departure of the Prince Siddhārtha, the city of Kapilavastu is personified as a city goddess wearing a similar crown (Fig. 14)<sup>67</sup>. Viṣṇu wears a long garland (*vanamālā*) reaching below his knees as seen on many Kashmiri sculptures<sup>68</sup>. Apart from the short *dhotī* tied loosely around the waist, the god's chest is devoid of any other garment. The absence of *yajñopavīta* or *upavīta* (sacred thread) is to be noted, though we do not exclude the possibility that it may have been indicated in colour painted over the chest.

The tree in front of the god deserves our attention. The species of the tree in question on the coins and of the sculpture cannot be identified for sure due to the absence of leaves. If it is a Pipal tree (*ficus religiosa* in Latin or *Ashvattha* in Sanskrit), we have a reference in the *Bhagavat Gītā* (10. 26) where Kṛṣṇa says "I am the ashvattha, lord of trees"<sup>69</sup>. At the juncture of the two main branches of the tree, a small figure emerges, most probably a child in *añjali mudrā* looking at the god in adoration. The complete absence of any parallel does not help us to determine the exact role of this child. One would immediately think of Garuda, the mount (*vāhana*) of Viṣṇu, but here he is devoid of any wings. He could also be a simple devotee. However, once again, if the tree in question really is a Pipal (*Ashvattha*), the *Skanda Purāṇa* provides us with an important piece of information. In this source it is stated that this sacred tree is a symbol of Viṣṇu who is believed to have been born under it. It further says that if a person does not have a son, he may consider the pipal to be his own child<sup>70</sup>. Could the child emerging between branches be then the personification of the tree? Although there is no absolute evidence to prove this hypothesis, I prefer to put it forward as a potential explanation.

However, the female figure emerging from the ground supporting the weight of Viṣṇu in her palms and looking at god in adoration is the Earth Goddess (Bhū Devī), consort of Varāha, an avatar of Viṣṇu (Fig. 13). Some sculptures from Jammu-Kashmir of a later date depict her between the feet of the supreme god. Late Karkota period (7th century CE) sculpture from Jammu and Kashmir depicting Viṣṇu vanquishing the titans Madhu and Kaitabha (Fig. 15) is the closest parallel to our sculpture which we are discussing (Fig. 13)<sup>71</sup>. Here the god holds the *śaṅkha* in front of his chest as on our Gandhāran sculpture. As observed by Pratapaditya Pal: “Not only does Viṣṇu hold the bow and arrow but the presence of the female between his legs introduces a unique and ubiquitous feature of Kashmiri icons of the deity. She is the earth goddess, who according to the *Vishṇudharmotta*, should always be represented between his feet looking up at the deity in admiration, as may be seen in the more typical Kashmiri Viṣṇu icon”<sup>72</sup>. Here Pal draws our attention to the 8th century copper alloy sculpture from the Asia Society, New York, depicting Viṣṇu with lion and boar heads. I would like to draw the attention of the reader once again to the stone sculpture of Viṣṇu as Vaikunṭha from Kashmir where, again, the Earth Goddess emerges from the pedestal<sup>73</sup>.

The richly jewelled goddess emerges from among the stylised acanthus leaves in a manner reminiscent of the classical Gandhāran sculptures<sup>74</sup>. One outstanding sculpture from Gandhāra depicting the descent of the Buddha at Samkashya from the Tāvatiṃsa with Utpalavarṇā greeting him at the foot of the ladder has a portrayal of a female figure emerging from the underworld providing a comparable iconography (Figs. 16 A & B)<sup>75</sup>. Clad in a long sleeved tunic and wearing rich earrings, bracelets, a necklace and an elaborate hair-dress with a curly fringe and a knot, this Nāginī also emerges from acanthus leaves shaped like cobra hoods appearing behind her head. Her hands making the gesture of veneration indicate that she was also there to venerate the Buddha descending to the earthly realm after an absence of three months and seven days. In the same manner the Earth Goddess (Bhū Devī) shows her utmost admiration to Viṣṇu by holding the god with her hands. The lineage pattern from the world of the gods to the world of men is thus symbolized by Bhū Devī emerging from the earth.

In conclusion, let me underline that the emergence of Vaiṣṇava imagery in north India can now be dated to the 3rd century BCE and that we can no longer pass over in silence the importance of the numismatic evidence. I have also made an attempt to show that in Gandhāra there was a transitional period characterised by composite images and innovative attempts seen on coin types and in plastic art. These efforts are the results of a multitude of interactions taking place in a region where civilisations from diverse horizons merged at the crossroads of Central Asia and North-West India. These unusual images gave way to the more strictly regulated and codified iconography of later Indian art.

## References

1. The well-organized Greek city of Ai Khanum was excavated by the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan under Paul Bernard between 1964 and 1978. The location on a triangular area at the confluence of the Oxus and the Kokcha rivers seems to have been strategic, with the city functioning as a military outpost to control the eastern territories. The residential quarters and public buildings such as the royal palace, administrative quarters, theater, gymnasium, and temples were built on the lower portion of the site, which was less exposed to wind. A huge palace in Graeco-Bactrian architecture, reminiscent of formal Persian palatial architecture, was built in the center of the lower city. The palace comprised courtyards surrounded by Corinthian, Doric, and Ionian colonnades, numerous corridors, residential and administrative buildings, and ceremonial rooms. A classical theater, with thirty-five rows of seats sitting 4,000 to 6,000 people, was equipped with three loges for the rulers. Its size was considerable by classical standards, being larger than the theater at Babylon. The largest temple was built according to the Zoroastrian model of massive, closed walls. For a recent update of the ancient city, see P. Bernard, 2009 and “Preface” in G. Lecuyot 2013, pp. ix-xx).
2. For more details about this discovery, see R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1973. These coins were first published by Paul Bernard (1971) followed J. Filliozat, 1973, R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, and more recently Osmund Bopearachchi, 2008, pp. 32-3 and Charlotte Schmid (2010, pp. 89-101) has studied them extensively.
3. See O. Bopearachchi, 1991, pp. 62-3.
4. J. Filliozat, 1973, p. 113-123.
5. On this matter see Filliozat 1973.
6. In the *Vaiṣṇavakhṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* (part V, ch. 5, 59), he is qualified as the wielder of plough as a weapon (Balabhadra).
7. *Ibid.*, part V, ch. 19, 9. “Balabhadra has the shape of a serpent. He holds iron club, mace, discus and lotus”.
8. R.C. Senior, 2001, type 20.1.
9. P. Bernard. 1971, p. 442; however in his article published with Audouin in 1974 he accepts Filliozat’s point of view.
10. R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, p. 9.
11. J. Filliozat, 1973, p. 114.
12. G.Fussman 1989, p. 5, no. 4.
13. C. Schmid, 2010, p. 90, n. 162. For an illustration of this statue, see A.K. Coomaraswamy, 1927, fig. 79.
14. See for example, A. Cunningham, 1879, pls. XIV, XV, XX, XXI, etc.

15. J. Marshall and A. Foucher, 1940, vol. II, pl. LII, South pillar of the eastern gateway, lower panel.
16. R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, pp. 23-5.
17. O. Bopearachchi, 1991, Agathocles, series 1-4.
18. R. Audouin & P. Bernard. 1974, p. 23.
19. O. Bopearachchi, 1991, series 10.
20. O. Bopearachchi, 1991, series 6.
21. This hypothesis was put forward by P.L. Gupta in a personal letter addressed to Paul Bernard; see R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, p. 25, n. 1.
22. P.S. Jaini, 1993, p. 242.
23. In the *Vaiṣṇavakhṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, ch. 19, 10-1. See the note by D.G. Tagare, p. 115, n. 1.
24. R.C. Senior, 2001, type 33.1.
25. I do not see any difference between the Greek letters engraved on monolingual issues executed by an official engraver and those figuring on these Indian coins: Bopearachchi 1991, series 1-8 and 13. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize here that although the dies were prepared by a Greek engraver the technique of making the flans was Indian. The quadrangular flans were cut from metal bands.
26. R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, pp. 23-4. For the coin type, see W. Pieper, 2013, p. 362-3, no. 1070.
27. O. Bopearachchi, 1999, pp. 83-5. J. Allan who, for various reasons, attributed these bronze series to Agathocles J. Allan, 1936, p. cxxxv.
28. W. Pieper, 2014. Also see Pieper, 2013, pp. 162-3, nos. 122-3, pp. 168-70, nos. 151-3,
29. W. Pieper, 2014, p. 54.
30. R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, pp. 14-5.
31. For a complete discussion about this inscription and various interpretations, see R. Audouin & P. Bernard, 1974, pp. 15-6 and also, C. Schmid, 2010, pp.100-4.
32. For an exhaustive discussion on Vima Kadphises's coinage, see Bopearachchi, 2008.
33. For the gold coins of Huviška depicting Skanda Kumara, Mahāsenā and Bizago, see Göbl, 1984, types 156 and 166. For a brief description of Kārttikēya stone sculptures, see D.M. Srinivasan, 2009.
34. The Vaiṣṇava imagery in the Mathurā region during the Sunga and Kuṣān periods was discussed in detail by Kalpana Desai (2011), R. C. (1965) and Doris Srinivasan (1979) and I have no intention discuss them here. For a recent study on these depictions, see C. Schmid, 2010.
35. O. Bopearachchi, 2008, p. 7, no. 13 and p. 15, fig. 2.
36. *Ibid.* pp. 25-7.

37. *Sula* originally signifies “pike”, but the term appears everywhere as synonymous with *trisula*-trident. For an exhaustive study on the *triśūla*, see Giulinao 2004.
38. For the axe as Śivaite weapon, see Mallmann 1963, pp. 248-249.
39. Rao 1914, p. 4.
40. See A.-M. Loth, 2003, pp. 46-7. This being said, one may argue that, as Mahādeva or Maheśvara, the greatest of all the gods, Śiva has the right to borrow the attributes of the other gods of the Hindu pantheon. In this regard one may also point out that Śiva is identified with Indra in the Vedas. In fact, in *Taittiriya Samhita* (IV. 5. 5) and in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (IX. 28. 3), he is called by Indra’s epithet ‘sehesrākaṣa’, the one with a thousand eyes. In the *R̥g Veda* (II. 33. 2-4) he is called ‘*vajravahu*’ the one whose arm is like a *vajra*. The solar disc is associated with the images of Śiva from Rang Mahal (Rajasthan) and Musanagar (Uttar Pradesh). The solar disc can also be an attribute which Śiva shares with his consort Durgā. Nevertheless, in the Kuṣāṇ context, the canonical types as described by *Purāṇic* texts seem to have had a less influence.
41. O. Bopearachchi, 2008, pp. 33-40.
42. M. Taddei, 1985.
43. Śiva depicted on the ornamental façade of the Amriteśvara temple at Amritapura in the Mysore Province, with sixteen arms, holds an *akṣamālā* along with the *pāśa*, *triśūla* and *kapāla*, see T.A.G. Rao, 1994, vol. 2, part 1, p. 152-3, pl. XXX.
44. G. Gnoli, 1963.
45. R.C. Agrawala, 1966.
46. M. Taddei, 1985.
47. O. Bopearachchi, 2008, pp. 36-9.
48. W. Zwalf, 1996, p. 54, 141, fig.136.
49. See O. Bopearachchi, 2008, p. 39, fig. 18.
50. O. Bopearachchi, 2009.
51. The best known and one of the earliest and largest panels depicting this scene is at Udayagiri (Vidiśa) cave no. 5 of the early fifth century, cf. J.C. Harle, 1994, p. 95, fig. 71.
52. This scene is depicted in one of the panels of the Varāha Cave Temple of Mamallapuram cf. A.-M. Loth, 2003, p. 64, fig. 45.
53. See notes 51 and 52.
54. I have discussed the sculptures evoking the zoomorphic boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, see Bopearachchi, 2009.
55. D.M. Srinivasan, 2009, p. 134, fig. 7.
56. J.C. Harle, 1994, p. 95, fig. 71.
57. See the note by W. Pieper (2013, p. 394, no. 1218) in this regard.



58. J. Cribb, 2010, p. 152, cat. no. 97. It was republished by D. Jongeward and J. Cribb, 2015, p. 292.
59. D. Handa, 2013.
60. P. Bernard (1985, p. 74) has already mentioned the importance of this sculpture. H. Zimmer, 1955, vol. II, pl. 40. On epigraphic and stylistic evidence, these reliefs are dated to the 2nd century BCE. This depiction is visible as we enter the cave to the left of the famous reliefs of Surya riding a chariot and Indra riding an elephant.
61. M.N. Khan, 2006, pp. 134-7, coin no. 3.
62. M.N. Khan, 2006, p. 137.
63. First by J. Cribb, 2010, p. 152, cat. no. 98 and then by D. Jongeward & J. Cribb, 2015, p. 292.
64. First by J. Cribb, 2010, p. 152, cat. no. 98.
65. A sculpture from the Allāhābād Museum dated to the fourth century CE depicts Viṣṇu standing frontally holding the *cakra* with the lower left hand and the *daṇḍa* with the lower right hand, both attributes being placed on the ground, see C. Schmid, 2010, p. 623, fig. 57.
66. According to the *Skanda Purāṇa* (part IV, ch. 38, 17b-8), the weapons of Hari are the discus with the lustre of the Sun, the divine mace, the sword Nandaka, the Puṇḍarīka (white lotus), and the *Pancajanya* (conch) of terrific sound having the lustre of the moon.
67. This Gandhāran sculpture is in a private collection in New York.
68. See for example the stone sculpture of Viṣṇu from Kashmir dated to the ninth century, in *Divine Presence. Arts of India and the Himalayas*, Casa Asia, Barcelona, 2003, p. 78, fig. 36. The *vanamala* is usually a long garland of flowers, but on our sculpture it looks more like chain.
69. For an exhaustive discussion on this theme, see Nandita Krishna & M. Amirthalingam, 2014, pp. 222-3.
70. See Nandita Krishna & M. Amirthalingam, 2014, p. 222.
71. This sculpture, now in the Los Angeles County Museum, was published by P. Pal (2007, pp 79-81, fig. 76).
72. P. Pal, 2007, p. 81. Also see the sculpture of Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇu of the 11th century from the Gadahar temple (Srinagar), J.C. Harle, 1994, p. 191, fig. 144.
73. See the same sculpture mentioned in the note 71.
74. The *acanthus* is one of the most common plant forms used in Greek and Roman decorative art and they are also used extensively in highly Hellenised Gandhāran art.
75. O. Bopearachchi, 2011, pp. 363-5, fig. 12.





Fig. 1A



Fig. 1B



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6A



Fig.6B



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

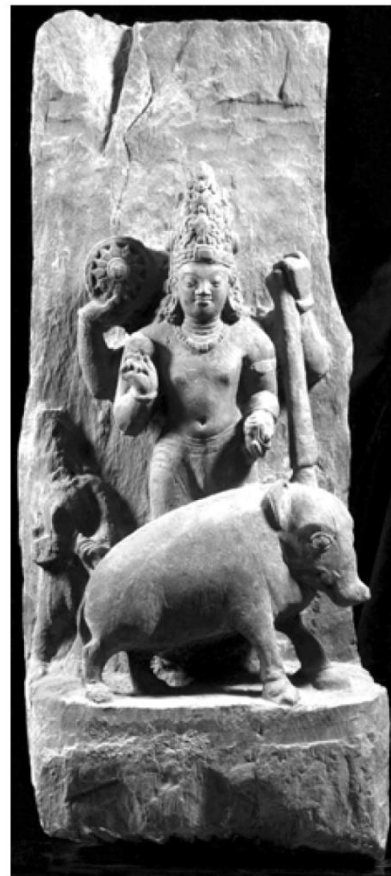


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14





Fig. 15



Fig. 16A



Fig. 16B

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